

REMARKS

Summary of the Office Action

Claims 1-11 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over the Published European Patent Application EP 0 856 972 A2 in view of *Kinjo et al.* (U.S. Patent No. 6,219,129).

Claims 1-11 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over the Published European Patent Application EP 0 878 956 A1 in view of *Kinjo et al.*

The Examiner is thanked for indicating that claim 12 includes allowable subject matter.

Summary of the Response to the Office Action

Applicant has amended claims 1, 4, 6, 9, 11 to differently define the invention and to improve the form thereof. Also, Applicant has canceled claim 12 without prejudice or disclaimer. Accordingly, claims 1-11 remain pending for further consideration.

All Subject Matter Is Allowable

Claims 1-11 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over the Published European Patent Application EP 0 856 972 A2 in view of *Kinjo et al.* (U.S. Patent No. 6,219,129), and claims 1-11 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over the Published European Patent Application EP 0 878 956 A1 in view of *Kinjo et al.*

Applicant respectfully submits that the rejection of claims 1, 6 and 11 becomes moot by incorporating the features of claim 12, which has been indicated as including allowable subject matter, into claim 1, 6 and 11, respectively. Applicant respectfully notes that minor changes to the limitations of claim 12 have been incorporated into the amendments of claims 1, 6 and 11 in order to improve their form. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 1, 6 and 11, as newly-amended, are in condition for allowance. Withdrawal of the rejection of claims 1, 6 and 11 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) is thus respectfully requested. Claims 2-5 and 7-10 are also in condition for allowance at least because of their dependencies on respective claims 1 and 6 and also because of the Office Action's indication of allowable subject matter.

With no other rejection pending, Applicant respectfully submits that claims 1-11 are in condition for allowance.

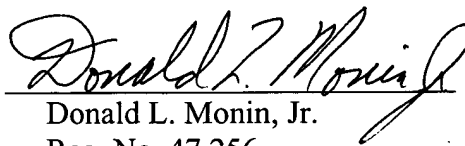
CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully requests entry of the amendments to place the application in clear condition for allowance or, in the alternative, in better form for appeal. Should the Examiner feel that there are any issues outstanding after consideration of this response, the Examiner is invited to contact Applicant's undersigned representative to expedite prosecution.

If there are any other fees due in connection with the filing of this Preliminary Amendment, please charge the fees to our Deposit Account No. 50-0310. If a fee is required for an extension of time under 37 C.F.R. § 1.136 not accounted for above, such an extension is requested and the fee should also be charged to our Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,

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